3s Mukherjea O. Y-4, 5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
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462 512 go with their cattle to look after their agriculture. [264] It is about 9 a.m. that they can think of a breakfast, when the women convey to the fields a plate of [262] "Bàsiàm damari" (*rice soaked in water and kept over-*[263] *night*) which they eat with relish with a pinch of salt and some "sang" (*fried leaves*) generally of "sajina" leaves. Now refreshed with a meal, they work on till midday. The women are in the meantime busy with the hearth, cook and clean the yards and houses with cow-dung. The men return from [264] the fields at noon and bathe and eat their noon-day meal, again of soaked rice and "sang." Now the [515] women can think of their food and this they take [264] after a bath and after the men have dined, exactly [171] like their Hindu sisters. It is now time for men to take some rest. They loll on "parkòms" (*stringed bed-steads*) and doze for a time and are off to their fields at about 2 p.m. in the afternoon. There they [517] dig, plough or sow till 4 p.m., and after returning from the fields go round the villages, visiting friends or indulge themselves in village sports. Meanwhile, [264] their wives cook their supper, draw water and husk paddy and again at about 5-30 p.m., the family take dinner, the same menu being repeated. The children are fed first, the men next, the women, last of all.

With evening, the Santals as a tribe shut themselves indoors. If you ask them, "Why do you retire so early?," They will perhaps answer with a bland

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The years pass, indistinguishable one from another except when famine or other calamity makes a landmark on which the memory will fasten in the years to come. Ten years ago many of the older men dated their birth according to whether they were born before or after "Seventy-two", the Bengali year 1272, when a disastrous famine broke up many families. Another memorable year was the year of the influenza epidemic that followed the close of the 1914–18 war, and young people today can calculate their age in relation to the year of the *malot*, or epidemic. The division of the year into months is somewhat vague, for whereas the only names for the months now current are the twelve months of the Bengali calendar, the Santal reckoning is based on the moon. As one man remarked: "We sometimes have to slip a month." In 1939, when this statement was made, there was confusion in the Santal calendar between *Bhador* (the Bengali month extending through a part of August and September) and *San*, the month that precedes it. Names are given to the phases of the moon according to its shape. Thus I was told: "The *Ende* (the Ind festival which in West Bengal is associated with Dharma worship) is observed during the month of *Bhador*, when the moon is shaped like an open umbrella."

The days of the week also have Bengali names, and the day is divided into periods, the names of which relate in some cases to the meals taken, in other cases to the duties which have to be performed or to a more general association of the time. When Santals wish to make an appointment at a particular time it is sufficient to point to the position in the sky where the sun will have climbed. Some time before dawn it is "little cockcrow", and this is followed by "cockcrow". *Basiam*, the time when breakfast is taken, is divided into three parts: "child *basiam*", "*basiam*" and "bent *basiam*". The word *basiam*, meaning "leftover", is a reminder that the breakfast consists of a small quantity of cold rice or rice gruel, cooked with the evening meal on the previous day and kept for the morning, when it is eaten with a little salt. The late afternoon is called the "time when women draw water". One way of describing a short period is to relate it to the time taken in boiling a pot of rice. Work is continued until the shadow of a house or a tree falls across a particular spot. It happens frequently that children draw a line outside their schoolhouse, so that when the shadow of the building falls across the line they know it is time to go home. A man who was in the habit of sleeping in

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practice of making an offering of his own blood is followed by the magician[1] when he is attempting to cure sickness. While the function of the priest is to deal with the tribal spirits, it would seem that his co-priest has to propitiate relatively unknown and fearful spirits; one might almost describe him as a kind of "minister for foreign affairs" in relation to the spirit world.

Santal worship centres round its sacred places, the most prominent of which is the *jaher*, the sacred grove usually to the west of the village. It consists of a number of tall, slim *sarjom* trees with perhaps one or two trees of other varieties, the whole having been left standing since the village was first founded. The surrounding forests have been cut down to form land for cultivation and for the homesteads, so the grove stands out from the landscape. Apart from festival occasions there is usually little to show the sacredness of the place, but the practice varies greatly from village to village. Two of the tallest trees standing side by side are thought to be the abodes of *Marak Buru*, the national spirit of the Santals, and of his female consort *Jaher Budhi*, the Old Lady of the Sacred Grove. At the side of the former tree one sometimes discerns the blackened stones of the fireplace at which the village priest cooks — apart from the rest of the village—his share of the offerings. Other relics of festivals may be found, such as an ear of paddy still attached to its stalk, tied round one of the trees and left there since the time of the offering of first-fruits. Sometimes there are semi-permanent posts in the ground near the more sacred trees, two in front of the trees and two at the back, with cross-pieces joining them to form the framework on which a temporary thatch is placed during the festivals over the place where the sacrifices are performed. One of the trees is the abode of the "Five and Six", and near it a post standing in the ground represents the place of one *Laga Thakur*, who acts as their watchman. Removed to a little distance is the place where the food of the villagers is cooked: the meals eaten here are communal. There are other trees at which the *kudam naeke* makes his blood offering to the boundary spirits, and these are indicated during the festivals by means of a piece of string. In some villages one finds indications of places at the edge of the grove at which one or other of the sub-clans performs its sacrifices. In some groves the space at the foot of the principal trees is tended carefully as befits a shrine. The ground is cleared and plastered regularly with cowdung and water, a cactus hedge is planted to

[1] The *ojha*. See Chapter 8, pp. 94 ff.

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"bringing in the shadow". If the people of the house are very poor a modified form of this ceremony can take place on the evening of the cremation; in any event, the particular day seems to be dictated by considerations of convenience, and it takes place also on the third and on the fifth day after death. All the villagers gather in the courtyard, where the senior member of the family kills a young hen by dashing its head against the lintel of the door into the house. One of its wings and one leg are tied to a stick and the remainder of the flesh is cooked. One portion of the cooked food is taken out to a cross-roads at the end of the village street, where a small thatched-roof "house" is constructed. The food is placed under this roof, the "house" is circumambulated three times in the same way as the funeral pyre and is then set on fire. A second portion is deposited in a basket, which in turn is placed in a rope sling and suspended from a rafter over the spot on the veranda, or it may be in the house, where the dead person expired. The remainder of the food is set on a plate made from *karam* leaves instead of on the usual leaf plate made from *sarjom*, and it has to be eaten by the chief mourner, the one who applied fire to the mouth of the corpse. He takes only a few mouthfuls, raising the food to his mouth with his left hand, this being the only occasion when a man uses his left hand for eating. The food that he leaves is taken to the cross-roads at the end of the village street and thrown away together with the implements in which it was cooked. When the people who took it are returning to the house they pass by an *ukhur*, or mortar, in which water has been left for the purpose, and each person dips the big toe of his left foot in the water as he walks past. They are accompanied by the chief mourner, who on his return to the courtyard takes the leg and the wing of the hen that were tied to a stick and throws them over the house. At this stage also, in some cases, the vessel containing the bones is dug up and brought to the house, where it is slung from a rafter: though in other cases it seems that the bones are left outside the village to await the time of their final disposal. Memorial stones are not set up at this or any other time.

When the food has been served to the chief mourner and to the spirit of the dead person, the rest of the villagers are feasted. If possible, the meal consists of a goat meat curry with rice, and there is a plentiful supply of rice beer. Before the villagers eat, one of the young men is possessed by the spirit of the dead and another is possessed by *Marak Buru*. These two sit side by side on the ground holding in their hands a new winnowing fan in

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765 which grains of rice are placed. These grains are both whole and
787 broken and separate out when they are shaken up. The possessed youths utter the guttural-sounding grunts which are typical of persons in their condition, shake their heads from one side to another and jerk the winnowing fans up and down. When the spirits are fully in control they are addressed by one of the relatives. He calls on the name of the deceased and says: "Now, *Gôsâĕ*, we have given you this rice, speak well to us. Tell us, how did you die and how did you fall? Did you leave us at your own wish, or was it through some disease or through someone's enmity?" On the answer to this question will depend in most cases the subsequent proceedings of the mourners. Questions are asked until the mourners are satisfied that there is no more information to be gained. The spirit of the dead man is cautious in making accusations, and imputations of witchcraft or spirit activity in causing death are usually couched in general terms, for his relations will have recourse to the *ojha* and the *jan* for confirmation if they deem it necessary to do so. At the end of the conversation the spirits go from one to another of the assembled company, and addressing them by name they ask for a drink of water. In return they are supplied with beer to drink, after which they return to normal consciousness. Next, the animal for
765 the feast is offered to the spirit of the departed. A sacrificial
769 square is marked out with flour in the courtyard and in it the
782 animal is fed on sun-dried rice. Vermilion is applied to it in the usual manner of sacrifices, but the animal is slain with a blow on the back of its head. This animal is provided by the bereaved household, but in addition each of the houses in the village provides a hen to contribute to the feast. The invocation with the offering is as follows: "Take this, *Gôsâĕ*; we are giving this to you in order that you may be freed from *Jom Raj Haḍur Raj*,[1] from the house of the *Suṇḍi* and the *Haḍi*." The *Haḍi* are the Hari caste, outcasts who tend the cremation grounds of the Hindus, and it may be that the *Suṇḍi*, who are now the sellers of drugs and liquor, have also been associated with the disposal of
765 the dead. When all the food is ready for the feast it is divided
.264 into three portions. One of these is for the people of the village, one for the bereaved household and one for their relatives, who have gathered whether they belong to the same village or have come from a distance for the occasion. As the food is being served to each person, the server tells him: "This piece is from the wing" or "This piece is from the leg"; all the meat is cut into small

[1] *Haḍur Raj*, another name for the king of the underworld.

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pieces to make for convenience in eating with the fingers, and it is a point of etiquette to serve each guest with a variety of delicacies from different parts of the bird or animal being eaten, but the flesh from the head is reserved for the chief mourner and his kinsfolk. 765 264.

With this ceremony one part of the final rites has been completed. The villagers who assisted at the cremation have been safeguarded against the dangers that are inherent in handling the corpse of a dead person and the village is again clean. The mourners have received much comfort from the display of village solidarity and from the sympathy of their kinsfolk and they are free once more to resume their daily work. They have also re-established contact of a kind with the spirit of the departed and so satisfied one of the most persistent longings of the human heart. He has spoken with them and explained from his present knowledge the reason for his death. The presence of the bones within the house or at least at the base of a tree just beyond the village acts as a continual reminder of his nearness to them. So far as the funeral rites are designed to compensate the living for their loss, all that can be done has now been done, but something still remains to be done before the departed spirit will be at rest. The bones have to be taken away to the river, where they will be floated away on the tide. The river in question is the Damodar,[1] which is known to them by the name *Nāī*, or River (all other rivers are called *gaḍa*); it lies from eighty to one hundred miles away from the farther villages—a considerable journey. The time for undertaking this expedition is dictated by the claims of work and other social obligations, and it usually happens that a party from a group of neighbouring villages set out together in the short period of comparative leisure which follows the transplanting of rice during the rains. An animal is set aside at home to be used at the final feast that will take place on the return of the travellers. Before they leave home an ear of the animal is pierced and the blood which falls is mixed with some sun-dried rice that is placed in the earthen pot with the bones. The ceremony at the river is carried out at one of several traditional cremation grounds that abound on its banks. These are Hindu sites, and the attendants, who are usually of the *Haḍi* and *Dom* castes, receive a fee from the Santals—a cloth and some money. The ceremonial reminds one of the procedure followed at the "water marriage" celebrations by the village tank. The site has to be bought, and upon it cowrie shells are placed in a circle

765 [783]

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[1] See Chapter 3, p. 28.

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794 177 178 158 The second main factor in producing tension is that the Christian becomes a member of a community that is different from the tribal community into which he was born and different from any other within his experience. He may know of one or two Santals who have been influenced by the Bengal form of Vaishnavism and have adopted some strange customs in consequence, and he is familiar with the semi-secret society formed by the *ojha* and his disciples, but neither of these provides any analogy with the society of which he now becomes a member. 794 797 177 178 152 The preaching of the Christian Faith has been pioneered by European missionaries, and up to the present the direction of the affairs of the Christian Church has remained in the hands of missionaries to a greater extent than in many other parts of India. Their apparent superiority tends to make the village Christian belittle his own ideas and institutions. Their superior wealth and beneficence tempt him to rely on their help, and sometimes produce resentment when the help is withheld for a reason which he is quite unable to appreciate, the desire to make him "independent". Furthermore, Santal Christians are linked 794 177 178 through the Church with Christians who come from other communities. This fusion of diverse elements produces strain at times. There has been no difficulty from the first in taking common meals, and this has safeguarded the witness of the • [264] Sacrament of Holy Communion to the unity of believers in Christ. On the other hand, many Christians shrink from contact with the corpse of a non-Santal Christian. Near the village of Samadi there used to be one household of Christians who were of Bhuiya stock. I was on tour in the area when the [264] old grandmother died. She was buried in the Christian burial ground, here, as in most villages, a piece of waste-land within the holding of one of the Santal Christians, but none of the local Santal Christians would touch the corpse. The persistence of such ideas varies, one might say, in inverse proportion to the degree of contact which the local community enjoys with other Christians. Samadi is in a far corner of the area and such an incident would not occur nearer to the centre. This can be further illustrated by the fusion that has been 794 177 178 gradually taking place in the Christian community through intermarriage. Although the village Christian abhors the thought of intermarriage, a few individuals have ignored the rule of tribal endogamy and have contracted marriages against which there 582 are no Christian sanctions. Those who have done so would not find it possible to continue to live in the village community, and